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ABSTRACT

Although nearly 90,000 students in the New York (New York) public schools participate in bilingual education programs and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, insufficient data are available to conduct effective program evaluations. The school system's bilingual and ESL programs achieved their size and permanence as a result of two lawsuits of the 1970s. The Aspira Consent Decree, using the precedent of "Lau v. Nichols," ensured the right of limited-English-proficient New York City students to bilingual education. English language education that would benefit from evaluation includes the following: (1) comparison of bilingual and ESL programs; (2) proficiency standards; (3) service delivery; (4) length of stay in bilingual programs; (5) educational needs of Hispanic students; (6) needs of students whose score on the Language Assessment Battery (LAB) are a little too high to qualify them for bilingual education; (7) language needs of non-Hispanic minorities; and (8) dual language proficiency. Data that should be transferred to the school's central computer file (student bio file) include the following: (1) country of birth; (2) country of last address; (3) language spoken at home; (4) length of stay in a language program; (5) educational achievement; and (6) parents' place of birth. Statistical data are included on two tables. (FMW)

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TEACHING FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

The Need for an Evaluation of Language Programs In the New York City Public Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly half of New York City's public school students are newcomers to the mainland U.S. or the children of newcomers, according to an analysis of 1980 U.S. Census data by the Department of City Planning.

English is not the first language for most of these children, a fact that has broad ramifications for educational practice. The schools offer bilingual education programs and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for students who are not proficient in English, and many students make use of them--nearly 90,000 in the 1985-86 school year.

Do the children who need it find their way to the schools' bilingual and ESL programs? How successful is each program in helping a child toward English proficiency and mastery of other subjects? Which children choose bilingual and which ESL? How long should a child remain in a language program? What happens to children whose English is just a little too good to qualify them for one of the language programs? Is there a correlation between English proficiency and school retention rates? Do language problems sometimes mask other difficulties that require other forms of remediation?

Such questions inevitably arise in any serious look at the schools' language programs. Answers are not easily found, however, because there is no systematic evaluation plan in place. This report presents the data that are available on children whose first language is not English, and identifies missing data that would be needed to reach a clear understanding of the optimal uses of the language programs.

The school system has always been the public institution most responsible for, and capable of, intergrating newcomers into the socioeconomics of New York. This is still the case today. In the past several years, the city has shown renewed and redoubled interest in promoting the well-being of its newcomers through such recent initiatives as the Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Mayor's Commission on Hispanic Concerns, and the Mayor's Task Force on Asian American Issues. The needs of hispanic children are receiving unprecedented attention within the schools themselves. It stands to reason that this would be the right moment to create an evaluation system that would supply the schools with adequate information to plan for their numerous pupils whose families are newcomers.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Trina Melloy teaches third grade at P.S. 89 in Elmhurst. In an average year, three-quarters of her students are of foreign birth. The high proportion of immigrant children in Mrs. Melloy's class is not unusual at P.S. 89, where an estimated 90 per cent of the student body is foreign-born. That percentage is much higher than average for the New York City public schools, but every school in the system has at least some immigrant children.

Analysis of 1980 Census data shows that 27.2 per cent of the city's public school children came from households that were headed by a parent who was born abroad. Of those children from "immigrant" families, a little less than half themselves were born abroad. The rest were U.S.-born.

"IMMIGRANT" CHILDREN IN NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1980

	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	CHILDREN IN NATIVE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS*	CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS			CHILDREN IN NON-FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS
			Total	U.S.-Born	For.-Born	
Number	1,003,220	726,940	273,120	143,680	129,440	3,160
Percent	100.0	72.5	27.2	14.3	12.9	0.3

*This category includes a small number of children who were born abroad but belong to families whose head is U.S.-born.

Source: 1980 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata File

Note that these are census data, not actual enrollment figures. Census data were used to permit analysis by birthplace of parent and child. Actual enrollment figures differ slightly from census figures, but not enough to alter this analysis.

Bilingual education and ESL programs concern all language-minority children, not just immigrants. Puerto Rican children are a large and important sub-set of the language-minority population. The fact that they are native-born Americans does not alter their need for language services. If Puerto Rican households are analyzed as immigrant households were analyzed, we find that in 1980, 17.4 per cent of the city's public school children came from families that were headed by someone who was born in Puerto Rico; and about a fifth of those children themselves were born in Puerto Rico. The rest were born on the U.S. mainland.

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICAN-BORN HOUSEHOLDERS
IN THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1980

	TOTAL	MAINLAND-BORN	P.R.-BORN
Number	174,380	138,320	36,060
Percent of Total School Enrollment	17.4	13.8	3.6

Source: 1980 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata File

Adding first- and second-generation Puerto Rican children with first- and second-generation immigrant children, we found that 44.6 per cent of the city's public school enrollees, a total of 447,500, were newcomers or the children of newcomers.

The children of immigrant families represented 134 nations in 1980, and they spoke 56 languages. Generally following citywide immigration trends, their primary countries of origin were the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, China, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago, in that order.

LEGAL HISTORY

The school system's bilingual and ESL programs achieved their size and permanence as a result of two lawsuits of the 1970s, one brought in New York by a Puerto Rican advocacy group and the other brought in San Francisco on behalf of a group of English-deficient Chinese children. Based primarily on civil libertarian concepts, these suits were part of the nation's stepped-up civil rights activism of the 1960s and 1970s.

Hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans migrated to New York City during the 1950s and 1960s and enrolled their children in the city's schools. In the late 1960s, the Board of Education hired several bilingual teachers and instituted bilingual programs in some schools.

The scope of these efforts did not satisfy the Puerto Rican advocacy group, Aspira. Aspira and other hispanic groups and individuals sued the Board of Education in 1972. The plaintiffs asserted that all Spanish-speaking children were entitled to bilingual education on the grounds of equal educational opportunity. An out-of-court settlement known as the Aspira Consent Decree (1974)

mandated a much expanded bilingual program for Spanish-speaking or Spanish-surnamed students who were deficient in English. The curriculum provided for major subject instruction in Spanish, intensive instruction in English, and a simultaneous development of Spanish language skills.

The final draft of the Aspira Consent Decree draw on a similar San Francisco case, Lau v. Nichols, as legal precedent. In 1970, non-English-speaking children of Chinese ancestry brought a class action suit against the San Francisco Unified School District. The plaintiffs claimed that they suffered unequal educational opportunities because of their limited English proficiency and that the school district had failed to provide adequate language programs.

In a unanimous 1974 decision, the United States Supreme Court decided for the plaintiffs and overturned lower court rulings. Justice Douglas wrote for the Court, "Students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education... [Such students] are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful." Over the years since the Aspira and Lau cases, the New York City public schools have established bilingual programs in an increasing number of languages as immigrants to this country have changed in ethnicity. All new language programs follow Aspira Consent Decree guidelines.

The State has supplemented the guidelines with mandates of its own. Any school that has 20 or more English-deficient children of the same grade and language group must provide bilingual education. Any school that cannot offer full bilingual classes, either because a language group is too small or because a bilingual teacher cannot be found, must make ESL instruction available.

ENROLLMENTS IN BILINGUAL CLASSES AND ESL-ONLY

In the 1985-86 school year, the schools provided bilingual classes for 41,000 students who scored at or below the 20th percentile on a standardized test of English language proficiency, the Language Assessment Battery or LAB. About 15,000 students who scored just above the cut-off also were enrolled in bilingual programs. These figures include students new to the bilingual programs and students who were continuing from prior years. Enrollees retake the test annually. Bilingual program enrollees are taught their major subjects in their native language, and English is taught as a separate subject.

In 1985-86, 70 per cent of bilingual program enrollees were speakers of Spanish; 11 per cent spoke Chinese, and 5 per cent, Haitian Creole. The remaining 14 per cent, in descending order of magnitude, were speakers of Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, Greek, Khmer (Cambodian), Hindi, Haitian French, Urdu, and Russian. No statistics are available on the numbers of Spanish-speaking enrollees who were Puerto Rican as opposed to foreign-born, but bilingual program staff observed that the proportion of foreign-born hispanics was growing. They also observed that the proportion of non-hispanic enrollees was increasing.

In addition to the bilingual programs enrollees, 30,600 students were enrolled in ESL-only. Students in ESL-only take their major subjects in mainstream English-speaking classes. They separate from the mainstream only for ESL. Various ethnic groups can and do mix in ESL classes because the classes are conducted in English. Students may be assigned to an ESL-only class if their school does not have a bilingual class in their language; or they may opt for ESL-only even when a bilingual class in available.

ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

How do bilingual programs and ESL-only measure up to one another? Some Board of Education staff members describe the two approaches as so different that they escape comparison. Still, certain questions do not go away. In the long run, who achieves more academically, the bilingual student or the ESL student? Are differences in outcome attributable to characteristics of the enrollees or characteristics of the programs? Does self-selection play a role? Who becomes more proficient in English? Are drop-out rates affected?

Students generally remain in their language programs until they pass the LAB with a score at or above the 21st percentile. But does a 21st percentile score indicate adequate English skills to compete in a mainstream classroom? Some school districts feel that even those students who score as high as the 30th or 40th percentile may need language programs. Such districts sometimes create "quasi-bilingual support services" for their students. Programs designed for "unentitled" students with higher than 20th percentile scores cannot make use of bilingual education funding; they must be supported with fund from the district's general budget.

Some entitled children never reach either a bilingual or an ESL class. In 1985-86, for example, nearly 89,000 students were eligible for language programs, but only 81 per cent of them were placed in full bilingual or ESL classes. The remaining 19 per cent received a part-program or no program, or their status was unknown. Their unsatisfactory situations were due to a variety of problems ranging from late enrollments to school non-compliance and poor record-keeping.

Thorny philosophical, educational, and political issues arise in the field of bilingual education. Opponents of language

programs believe that bilingual education stagnates students, who never learn English; joining the mainstream at the start would work much better, they contend. Supporters of bilingual education counter these claims with success stories of children who could not have progressed without bilingual education. Both viewpoints probably contain some truth. Some students undoubtedly do remain in bilingual programs for too long, but a limited period of bilingual educational does enable others to overcome the language barrier and move on to general academic success.

Which is the exception and which the rule? How long do bilingual students usually remain out of the mainstream? Do other problems than language contribute to the length of time? Does the length of stay correlate (positively or negatively) with academic success, both during and after program participation? Better data collection and analysis might assist in answering these questions.

In recent years, school systems across the country have begun to focus attention on the particular needs of hispanic school children, whether or not the children are technically deficient in English. Their problems include difficulties in social and cultural adjustment, poor academic progress, a high drop-out rate, and inadequate vocational preparation. Their educational interests include retention of the native language and culture. Some commentators believe that English language deficiency may accompany a wider range of learning problems that demand responses over and above language instruction. It is not clear whether these problems differ for hispanics born abroad, hispanics born in Puerto Rico, hispanics born in the mainland U.S., and hispanics whose families go back and forth between homes (and schools) in the Caribbean and New York.

There is growing concern as well for students who score at or above the 20th percentile, whose English skills aren't bad enough to qualify them for special attention nor good enough to ensure academic success.

In New York City, hispanic children are not alone in warranting further inquiry. Jamaica sends the second largest group of foreign-born children to the New York public schools. Children from Jamaica and other ostensibly English-speaking countries of the Caribbean are not eligible for language programs because their official language is English. In actuality, many of these children speak a Creolized form of English that is virtually a foreign language when the Creolization is deep. Their language problems have come under study by a task force of public school and university educators, but in general these problems are being handled at the district level. Some districts have placed Jamaican children in regular ESL programs, or, using district funds, they have set up modified ESL classes specifically for Jamaican students. There is no citywide policy, and children in this category are not covered under the Aspira or Lau mandates.

In 1985, Chancellor Nathan Quinones reconstituted the Chancellor's Citywide Commission on Bilingual Education and charged its members with developing an educational policy for all language-minority children in the public schools, not just those who were deficient in English. In 1986, the commission recommended that all public school children develop proficiency in two languages (one of them English) whether their primary language was English or not. In mid-1986, the recommendation was scheduled for presentation to the Board.

An evaluation of current bilingual and ESL programs was not part of the commission's mandate, and the commission did not address

itself to these issues. Chairman Guillermo Linares said, however, that such an evaluation would be complementary with the commission's objective of fortifying dual language proficiency.

DATA COLLECTION AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

The schools' procedures for data collection and analysis, program evaluation, and program planning have yet to reach the thoroughness that many school staff desire. In January 1984, the Office of Educational Assessment undertook a longitudinal study of some characteristics of language-minority children. "An Educational Profile of Language-Minority Students in the New York City Public Schools" appeared as its first report. The report described some attributes of students who took the LAB test in spring 1982, both the students who scored below the 20th percentile and therefore qualified for language instruction, and the students who scored above. The report posed the important question of academic performance among the group who scored a little too high to qualify for language instruction. The authors proposed to study this issue and others in subsequent years. The second report, based on 1983 data, is now in preparation.

Although the first report is interesting and useful, it is limited by questions that are framed too broadly and by the absence of data that would permit meaningful program evaluation and planning. The second is expected to suffer from the same limitations, and the authors acknowledge that the focus will narrow furthur in future reports.

For maximum utility, data on students must be transferred to the schools' central computer file, known as the "bio" file, so they can be cross-tabulated with other data items. Then the data

must be tabulated in a form that can be used by data analysts and program planners. Various important data elements are being collected by the schools, but they are not necessarily being entered in the bio file or printed out for program planning purposes. Within the family of nationality and language issues discussed here, some of the more important data elements are:

.Country of birth. This is collected for most pupils at the home school, but it is entered in the bio file only for language program participants, and it is not tabulated. If it were tabulated for the entire school population, it could be used to ensure maximum funding from federal programs that call for such information; to evaluate the use of language programs by, and their effectiveness for, specific nationality groups; to study the educational needs of foreign-born students who are not technically deficient in English; and to assist the city in following immigration trends in the years between decennial censuses.

.Country of last address. This is substituted by the schools for country of birth.

.Language spoken at home. This is collected for every student but is not entered in the bio file. Discussions are under way at the Board on the possibility of adding it to the file.

.Length of stay in a language program. These data have been on the bio file since 1982, but they are not regularly tabulated or used for program planning and evaluation.

.Educational achievement of language minority children, including those never in language programs, formerly in language programs, or currently in language programs. The data have been in the file since 1982 and were used in the "Educational Profile of Language Minority Students." No regular use is made of them.

.Parents' place of birth. No agency of which City Planning is aware collects this information. It could be used to evaluate the educational needs of children whose parents are immigrants or island-born Puerto Ricans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Add information on nativity and language background to the bio file for all public school students, not just those students who are involved or potentially involved in bilingual education or ESL.

2) Develop an ongoing evaluation program, with measures that can be used from year to year, to test the effectiveness of the bilingual and ESL programs, in comparison with each other and with no program.

3) Analyze the relationship between academic success and length of stay in a language program, and analyze other factors that influence the effectiveness of the programs, including characteristics of the programs themselves and characteristics of the user groups.

4) Study the characteristics and academic history of students whose LAB scores are a little too high to qualify them for a language program in order to determine if a low passing score can sustain academic progress.